

left of those fine wall-paintings, which I have described in Chapter VII as discovered in the larger of two ruined rotundas. While thus engaged I received information from Sir George Macartney, the British Consul-General at Kashgar, that an obstructive edict had issued from the Chinese provincial headquarters ordering the district authorities to prevent surveying work on our part. It was meant virtually to put a stop to all my intended explorations. The intercession of the British Minister at Peking had been immediately invoked by that ever-watchful friend. But meanwhile I should have to contend, if not with an attempt at forcible interference, yet with Chinese passive obstruction, so easy to apply in my circumstances.

Fortunately the expected prohibition from Charkhlik never came. As I found out later, I owed this lucky escape to the opportune 'revolutionary' outbreak. It had disposed of the legitimate district magistrate before he could take any action. His rebel successor, who had taken charge of the Ya-mên and found the orders there, had more urgent and profitable business to attend to before he was killed himself. Subsequently the military commandants, in strict observance of Chinese official rule, had carefully abstained from attending to civil affairs and kept the Ya-mên papers sealed up until the new magistrate had arrived from the distant headquarters at Urumchi and taken charge of the seal of office. But what a relief it was when I had safely collected all I needed and could set out for the waterless desert where there was no possible risk from human interference!

My tasks included the excavation of any ruins which the intended fresh explorations in the dried-up delta of the Kuruk-darya and the search for the ancient Chinese route